

Guidelines for Analyzing Genres

1. *Collect Samples of the Genre*

If you are studying a genre that is fairly public, such as the wedding announcement, you can just look at samples from various newspapers. If you are studying a less public genre, such as the Patient Medical History Form, you might have to visit different doctors' offices to collect samples. If you are unsure where to find samples, ask a user of that genre for assistance. Try to gather samples from more than one place (for example, wedding announcements from different newspapers, medical history forms from different doctors' offices) so that you get a more accurate picture of the complexity of the genre. The more samples of the genre you collect, the more you will be able to notice patterns within the genre.

2. *Study the Situation of the Genre*

Seek answers to questions such as the ones below.

Setting: Where does the genre appear? Where are texts of this genre typically located? What medium, context? With what other genres does this genre interact?

Subject: What topics is this genre involved with? What issues, ideas, questions, etc. does the genre address? When people use this genre, what is it that they are interacting about?

Participants: Who uses the genre?

Writers: Who writes the texts in this genre? Are multiple writers possible? How do we know who the writers are? What roles do they perform? What characteristics must writers of this genre possess? Under what circumstances do writers write the genre (e.g., in teams, on a computer, in a rush)?

Readers: Who reads the texts in this genre? Is there more than one type of reader for this genre? What roles do they perform? What characteristics must readers of this genre possess? Under what circumstances do readers read the genre (e.g., at their leisure, on the run, in waiting rooms)?

Motives: When is the genre used? For what occasions? Why is the genre used? Why do writers write this genre and why do readers read it? What purposes does the genre fulfill for the people who use it?

3. *Identify and Describe Patterns in the Genre's Features*

What recurrent features do the samples share? For example:

What *content* is typically included? What is excluded? How is the content treated? What sorts of examples are used? What counts as evidence (personal testimony, facts, etc.)?

What *rhetorical appeals* are used? What appeals to logos, pathos, and ethos appear?

How are texts in the genres *structured*? What are their parts, and how are they organized?

In what *format* are texts of this genre presented? What layout or appearance is common? How long is a typical text in this genre?

What types of *sentences* do texts in the genre typically use? How long are they? Are they simple or complex, passive or active? Are the sentences varied? Do they share a certain style?

What *diction* is most common? What types of words are most frequent? Is a type of jargon used? Is slang used? How would you describe the writer's voice?

4. *Analyze What These Patterns Reveal about the Situation*

What do these rhetorical patterns reveal about the genre and the situation in which it is used? Why are these patterns significant? What can you learn about the actions being performed through the genre by observing its language patterns? What arguments can you make about these patterns? As you consider these questions, focus on the following:

What do participants have to *know or believe* to understand or appreciate the genre?

Who is *invited* into the genre, and who is *excluded*?

What *roles* for writers and readers does it encourage or discourage?

What *values, beliefs, goals, and assumptions* are revealed through the genre's patterns?

How is the *subject* of the genre treated? What content is considered most important? What content (topics or details) is ignored?

What *actions* does the genre help make possible? What actions does the genre make difficult?

What *attitude toward readers* is implied in the genre? What attitude toward the world is implied in it?